Nimbus

#2

There's No Time Like The Present...

There really isn't, you know. The vagaries of time rush in upon us faster than anything ever created in the gigantic immensity of this universe. The past--and our memories of it--began one single instant ago: Likewise with the future. What we consider "Now" is gone before the thought of it is even completed . . . and we stand in the future of one microsecond ago, even less--and are swirled into the past of one instant from that, over and over again, constantly, never stopping, never ending, never stopping . . .

Speculations like that focus on small things, everyday things, little things . . . but it's like trying to uncover the sqaure root of 2: A simple, everyday number--it's there with us all the time, while we stand blindly on top of it, never guessing at the infinity of numbers all dissolving deep within it. Speculations like that are already awesome enough alone--take them, magnify, project them onto a soundstage a hundred times larger than life, and you have an unimagined universe of light, and color, and beautiful, crystal-sharp synapses, mind-links with the wonderment of everything, all waiting--beckoning!--for a glimpse of our understanding, understanding brought on by a rationale far beyond what we have now. It forces you to speak in abstract terms, to juggle your realities around just the tiniest bit: Before you know it, you've solved the riddle of the universe. Cosmic stories can do that to you, you know.

Welcome to NIMBUS TWO.

As you might have surmised, we've decided here to go

cosmic

this issue, and had a very weird and good time doing it up. Within these pages you'll find a veritable gallery of the cosmic heroes, all either written about, analyzed, or portrayed. We've got the good ol' gang back from NIMBUS ONE--Pete, Dave Don, Sam, Ric, Tim, War, a couple of Steve's, and a couple of Frank's (I've got relish all over me and the talented Mr. Cirocco's covered with sweet onions and chili)--and we'd like to extend a hearty hello to our old and new friends like Arv Jones, Des Jones, Keith Pollard, Aubrey Bradford, Duffy Vohland, John Byrne, Mike Zeck, Paul Kupperberg, and newcomers Karl Kesel, Hoy Murphey, Mac Patterson, and the amazing Rich Bruning. Together with guests Mike Friedrich, Nick Cuti and others, we've managed to do quite a bit with what we've got.

An explanation or two before you head on in, though--Doctor Strange isn't in this "cosmic" issue simply because we consider him in more of a mystic vein (an aspect certainly worth a full issue in itself!); and Killraven is because author Don McGregor was immensely kind in granting us a truly amazing interview that might just possibly kindle some insight into the fact that Don's plans for the series are nothing short of quite cosmic indeed!

Aside from the previously mentioned help we had in putting together this second issue of NIMBUS, there are a couple of things I'd like to set down seperately now, about a few of the special people involved here. One of them, of course is dashin' Don McGregor, about whom a quick tribute is given prior to the in-depth interview with him later in the issue. Few people know this, but Don is in actuality the true reincarnation of Ian Fleming. Next in the paragraph is the multi-faceted Duffy Vohland, whose help in compiling this issue is really quite immeasureable, and made for some nice, polished touches. Nice guy, that Duffy, now that they've got him on a staple diet. Finally, the double bow to Arv and Des Jones, who've made the trip from fandom to prodom. Des is the one who did that fantastic logo you'll be seeing around as we get famous (it's already on the cover for those of you nice enough to have given us a try), and both Arvell and Des edited the fanzine Fan Informer, from which the title of this beloved ragsheet originated. Seems your editor here was doing an s-f strip in their fine zine called, coincidentally, "Nimbus". The name stuck. You can pick up, by the way, a copy of FI (with works often by the likes of Starlin, Milgrom, Jones, Pollard, and Buckler) at 5729 Cadillac, Detroit, Michigan 48213, for 50¢.

In any case, on with the show. We've got just about all the cosmic characters in the comic book mythos here with us--from as obvious as Capt. Marvel and Warlock to a few that might surprise you, or tickle you, or intrigue you. We were moderately successful with our first issue--we've got a nice little letter column to maybe bring that out somewhat--and especially with our newcomers and the showcasing of their works, we really mean it when we try to be the Apple Records of comic fandom. Give us your comments and see if our heads are on straight! In any case, enjoy yourselves, take care, and follow the wind: It just might take you somewhere.

Frank J Lovece

"Deep in the jungle where the mighty tiger lies,
Bill and his elephants were taken by surprise,
So Captain Marvel zapped him right between the eyes--"

"The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill"
by Lennon and McCartney

For this, our letters page title and NIMBUS TWO's preview column, I kindly thank the Beatles, who gave me a different reality, a long time ago . . . .

NIMBUS TWO, December, 1975. Published by Maple Leaf Enterprises, U.S. office at 947 Maple Drive, #15, Morgantown, W.Va. 26505. Phone (304) 599-3976. Entire contents of this issue are copyright (c) 1975 by Maple Leaf Publications and may not be reproduced without written permission of the editor. All characters are the copyrighted properties of their respective publishers----Marvel, National, Charlton and Gold Key comics groups. Single issues: 75¢. Back issues: NIMBUS ONE, with work by Cirocco, McGregor, Leialoha, Kane, and others is available for 75¢. Frank Lovece, Editor/Publisher; Paul Kowtiuk, Publisher Emeritus.

Adam Strange

The Thinking-Man's Hero

By Hoy Murphey

Of all the many super-heroes who glut the comic book market today, how many do not rely on fantastic powers, mechanical gimmicks, or plain brute strength? Not very many. After all, super-heroes are what sells. Few people would buy a comic about an ordinary man who relies solely on his own resourcefulness and quick wits. Not today's audience, anyway.

But back in the days before the super-hero boom of the early 1960's, there was one character who was not endowed with superhuman abilities. He was a simple archeologist whose greatest ability was thinking out his problems and finding logical solutions to them.

Doesn't sound too exciting in these days of soul jewels, flying surfboards, and cosmic awareness, does it? But it is because of this talent that Adam Strange deserves to be listed with this issue's "cosmic" heroes.

Very few fans are even aware of the existence of Adam Strange. Those who have heard of him tend to stick up their noses at what they believe to be an obscure DC kiddie character who used to be in one of the old science fiction comics. Unfairly, many blame him for the demise of the Deadman strip in Strange Adventures.

Adam made his debut in three issues of Showcase (#'s 17, 18, and 19), well before the '60's super-hero revival. This was not unusual. Science fiction was selling well at the time, and the introduction of a "spaceman" character was logical.

Adam Strange was an ordinary Earth archeologist who had discovered the legendary Inca city of Caramanga, where the Indians had stored their vast treasure of gold during the Spanish conquest of Peru. The Incas, who had kept their treasure a secret for more than 300 years, did not appreciate this intruder, and set out to kill him. Adam ran until he came to a 25-foot wide chasm. Having no other choice, Adam hurled himself across the gap. At the apex of his leap, he was struck by a brilliant flare of light, and the next thing he knew, he was facing a strange predatory animal in an even stranger setting. Adam was rescued by a beautiful brunette in a large flyer, and taken to a city. There he was taught the language of this world by the use of a "menticizer." The girl was named Alanna, the city Ranagar, and the planet was Rann of the star system Alpha Centauri. Adam Strange's 25-foot leap had turned out to be a 25-trillion mile leap!

Adam soon learned from Alanna's father and Ranagar's chief scientist, Zardath, that he had traveled to Rann by way of a "Zeta beam." Originally intended as a communication signal to contact Earth, the beam had been altered by space radiation, and had become instead a teleportation beam.

Thus was established the setting for the many adventures Adam and Alanna were destined to have: Adam found that after a period of time, the Zeta radiation wore off, and he was instantly drawn back to Earth. But the Zeta beams, which had been sent out at irregular intervals and took four years to reach Earth, were used many times in succeeding adventures to return Adam to Rann.

Rann's history was interesting. Hundreds of years before, Rann had been populated by a super-scientific civilization. An atomic war had destroyed this society, and most of the population had reversed to barbarism. Most of the scientific knowledge was lost, and the people clustered in city-states that often warred with each other. At the time of Adam's arrival, some of the city-states were regaining the scientific progress of their ancestors and were learning to get along with each other (although there were still some scattered barbarian cities).

Adam gained a space-suit/uniform, a ray gun, and a rocket backpack. His early adventures consisted of contacting the Zeta beam on Earth, traveling to Rann, confronting and defeating a menace, and returning to Earth when the Zeta beam wore off. This is where much of the criticism of the Adam Strange strip comes in. Many fans claim the stories were too formulized, that each story was only a slight variation on the same theme. For a long time, this was true. But during the early part of Adam's career, he was restricted to 9- and 10-page stories, and there was not much room for anything else.

Author Gardner Fox always seemed to do a good job with these restrictions, and always tried to come up with variations on the formula. He often used an entire page to tell some of the difficulties Adam had in contacting the Zeta beam, whether because of natural obstacles such as a mountain rising out of the sea at the point of contact, or having to give two boys a dollar to go get ice cream because they were sitting on a park bench where the beam was due to hit.

As Adam became more established, his stories were expanded to at least 15 and often 25 pages. Fox knew what to do with the extra pages, and used them to their best advantage by concentrating more on sub-plots and characterization. This improved the stories greatly, and made them even more enjoyable.

But what made Adam stand out from the gathering crowd

(continued on page 19)

Man . . .

by Frank Lovece

Meanings rest in people--the word is not the thing. *Say the word "cat" to someone and you could as easily conjure in his mind the image of a mountain lion, a calico, or a sexual mate as well as that of a ten-ton tractor. Say the words "love," "God," or "war" to anyone, and the images will be even less concrete--downright vague as a matter of fact.* There are words like that in our language of human civilization, words that you can say to someone and open up a world of thoughts and ideas by merely a single mention.

Someone said the word "energy" to Nick Cuti.

Suddenly, it happened--with all the subtlety of an exploding super-nova, Charlton Comics re-entered the historically risky (for them) field of super-heroes. Most of the proceedings of that 1973 spring and summer have already been accounted for--how an obscure new title came silently upon the newsracks, how a company that'd met repeatedly with a less-than-favorable response to the super-hero market (Capt. Atom, Thunderbolt, The Peacemaker) felt a premonition to give it another go, and how the company that had spawned such talents as Dick Giordano, Jim Aparo, Frank McLaughlin and Roy Thomas had yet to midwife the birth of not only a new artistic talent, but an entirely new style, epitomized by a man named Joe Staton--but there's always more to say, always those tiny items that somehow make up the conerstone of that mystique called "discussion." Without room for that, society would be a very cut-and-dried affair. And in this case, the discussion could go on for a long, long time. The new book, you might say, looked good.

The beginnings of that new title, that book called, almost facetiously, E-Man, occurred not so much in an immense display of starlight glittering from the heavens as it did in the Charlton Comics main offices in Derby, Connecticut. Nick Cuti, E-Man author, recalls:

"My boss, George Wildman, said to me that, 'I've finally talked the publishers into doing a super-hero, so why don't you come up with some ideas?' Well, one of my favorite super-heroes of yesteryear was Plastic-Man, and I wanted to create some character that would be comical like Plastic-Man and at the same time be a unique character, something really different, so I came up with E-Man, and I thought the best person to draw that would be Joe Staton, because his style seemed like it would fit. He had done Primus and needed another book, more or less, so I suggested to George that we use Joe Staton. I called up Joe on the phone and gave him all the facts and we did up a drawing of E-Man, and that was it."

Comic books, as you know, are generally dated about three months in advance. Some of the foundation reasons for that seem lost in antiquity, but the basic explanation has always been that, technically, the cover date is supposed to be when the books are to be taken off the racks. Sometimes that'll sound good in theory, but . . . whatever. In any case, the October, '73 books, out in the summer of the year, debuted E-Man #1, and it looked like the "Marvel" Age of new ideas was being done all over again. Here, under the skillful hands of writer (and assistant editor at Charlton) Nick Cuti, and the refined pencil-and-inks of Joe Staton, a legend seemed to begin.

It started quite simply--first there was the nova explosion of an unnamed star, then there was the old "infinite number of monkeys at an infinite number of typewriters in an infinite space of time" bit. Without the star, you might get a Shakespearean play or a Wagnerian opera--but with it . . . that's where the true imagination begins!

Now we have in our scenario a shapeless mass of released energy from that star. Granting the infinity factor, it possesses intelligence (Nick Cuti, capable of comic subtlety as well as any man, utilized an intriguing play-on-words that first issue; reversing the old theorum, "I think, therefore, I am," the energy packet's first thought was: "I am and I know that I am.") Wandering for millions of years in the eternal void of outer space, it grew in knowledge in its travels (if not what you'd call maturity).

But still, the question has to be--if you can accept all that--how? Scientifically, it was a probable stunt (more than merely possible). After all, the same principle that gives laboratory scientists the material to begin to create artificial life gives that same material naturally to a nova. It goes like this:

Now, in certain thermal-nuetron-induced fissions between Earthian elements (U^{235} and Pu^{259}, for an example), there are, among other things, secondary nuetrons released, along with long-range alpha- and beta-particle disintegration, characterized by energy spectra almost indistinguishable from those applicable in low-energy-induced fission, but unique, nonetheless. For just a moment, though, try and imagine that within the extreme vastness of outer space there might be a few elements present beyond that which are recorded on our atomic table (the certainty of of that has already been discussed by physicists for years; after all, the last two decades have seen not only the laboratory-created addition of three new elements, but a myth shattered in the reaction of a member of what once were termed the "inert gases"). Assume, now, that such an element might, in a thermal-nuetron-induced fission (like, say, one caused by a nova in space), continue beta-particle disintegration like business as usual, and capture, as is normal in such a reaction, what's termed a "fast" nuetron (as does, here again in an analogous ex-

and E-man

With a tip o' the quill to Nick Cuti

ample, the most common isotope of uranium, $_{92}U^{236}$), then the nucleus of the ensuing reaction will be formed with a high excitation level, and if such a new element had a very high atomic weight (as physicists have already postulated in regard to dense star-core material, perhaps even in the thousands), the beta disintegration would be dramatically high (and, conversely, alpha-particle disintegration'd be slowed, perhaps even held in stasis); thusly, a very large amount of highly-reactive antinuetrinos will be released. If those antinuetrinos were to begin reacting with the free protons released during fission, then nuetrons, positrons, and other infinitesmal matter are formed. When saddle-point configuration (that of maximum energy potential) is reached and passed, then the new fragments, charged with the pressure of the present alpha-particles, would begin a chain reaction that would ultimately end in a final point of actual . . . life.

Y'know, if they weren't trying to create artificial life in just such a manner every day in laboratories all across the country, I might not believe what I just said. But, as it is . . . !

Anyway, that certain form of energy-life created by the nova at last made it to this third-from-the-sun mudball we occupy. Nick and Joe revealed two stories of how that occurred, one in the premiere issue, one in the final issue (#10). That second story was needed to clear several questionable factors, namely, how did it learn human life-style, language, things like that? It appeared first (chronologically, not as published) to a country girl named Maisy June (amidst a scathing memorial/satire to/of Al Capp and his famed newspaper strip, replete with fluttering copies of "Fearless Fosdick" comics and posters urging one to elect "Capp for Dawg Catcher"). Eager to learn and completely innocent, the energy-creature became the girl's own genie, outfitted in a costume similar to the one he would later adopt, except for the major differences of a huge, high-collar cape and a single "G" on his chest, for genie. He had taken human shape, of course. "And so," says Nick, "Before he was E-Man, he was G-Man!"

What would Elliot Ness have had to say?

In the preceeding issues, Nick Cuti and Joe Staton combined to introduce for certain the "hero" they called, at last E-Man. In a lively, tongue-in-cheek portrayal—and after all, how else could one tell a story with the inane genius of Staton at the artistic helm?—the creature took up with a beautiful Earthian girl, who called herself Nova Kane ("Don't you like it? My real name isn't Nova Kane . . . it's Katrinka Colchnzski, but I prefer Nova Kane."), an "exotic dancer" (hello, Mr. Darwin) working nights to pay for a geology major's tuition and such.

Now here, just as a reader of real science-fiction gets set to call it all a bad dream, something happens. Maybe it's the hero's puppy-dog innocence—arrayed in a costume that would be called kinda cute before streamlined—or maybe it's it Nova Kane—a self-styled, free-living, liberated woman in a truer sense than any other ever portrayed in the comics; armed with a feel for responsibility and a great deal of common sense, she comes off as the woman of the future—or maybe it's the easy rapport between them—Caption: "With the destruction of the Brain, the boat and the robots were rendered harmless." Nova: "E-Man! Let's go home. Did you bring any money with you?" E-Man: "Uh . . . what's money?"—or maybe it's in the blend of script and art, flowing like a crystal river; whatever it is, it started a movement-of-sorts, one brought to the attention of the media in such diverse places as Fantastic and The New York Review of Comics and Books. But why?

Maybe it's a cop-out, but to really understand, you'd have to read them. Words in prose can serve only to give one a general idea of what to expect—Frank J. Hayes, III, in Fantastic come close with, "a satirical view of mass-medium science-fiction"—but its easy-going style, one that feels comfortable introducing regular characters like a rumpled detective named Mike Mauser who bears more than a little resemblance to the rodent, though the name comes from the gun, and a grinningly intelligent koala bear named "Teddy," tends to remind one more of Will Eisner's "The Spirit" than it does anything else.

As the series progressed, guardian-angel Nova christened her outworld charge Alec Tronn (whether or not in total seriousness we'll never know), and we were treated to inane yet critically-all-too-true views of Disneyworld, television, the energy crisis (the story of a businessman who bought people to tap their energies for fuel), and many, many others in the book's short span. It was a very fun and enjoyable strip, as well as being literate and having, in its own way, important things to say, and its fans and admirers were legion. The book, E-Man, had an exceptional writer/artist team, as well as being a labor of love. And it worked decidedly on two levels. So, "logically," what happened?

It folded up, that's what!

There's probably no explanation really (other than the fact that not enough people, apparently, were buying it). Nick Cuti offered us a little-known bit of bad news: "The book never sold well. They kept it in the line as long as they did because I was assistant editor and the publishers hated to drop the book because of that fact. But from the very beginning, it was never a big seller."

(continued on next page)

(Continued from last page)

Which isn't, you know, to be construed as that they didn't try. Back-up features were a mainstay of the bi-monthly book, done by the likes of Steve Ditko, Wayne Howard, and Tom Sutton. The unique Rog-2000, a robot from the pages of a fine fanzine called CPL, began to appear, done by Cuti and Canadian illustrator John Byrne (whose work, incidentally, appears in a couple of spots within our own pages--got to throw a plug in somewhere!). The inimitable Rog, appearing in E-Man #'s 6, 7, 9, and 10 was quite easily as enjoyable as the lead feature---the humor, here, was the insurmountable high point, though, and the get-up-and-fight-again guts of Rog-2000 might have easily, if the magazine had held out, become a spin-off book itself. The origins of how a fanzine mascot leapt into the pages of a prominent (it may not have sold, but no one can say it wasn't prominent!) comic go about like this: "CPL had sent us some copies of their fanzine, and there was this little robot called Rog in it, and I liked it very much; when I met John at the convention, I asked my boss if we could use John's character in the back of E-Man. He said fine, so I wrote a few stories, sent them to John, John illustrated them, and we've been using him since." Nick added, because some folks didn't know better, that, "It's Rog, soft g." Aside from John Byrne: "It doesn't help when you write a story called 'Rog vs. the Sog!'"

Another step made to preserve the magazine came in the eigth issue, when Nova received powers akin to E-Man's. "I've always wanted to do a female super-hero," says Nick (and Frank adds, "Uh . . . super-heroine?"), "and I felt this was a perfect opportunity to try it. Liberty Belle (a Ditko back-up in E-Man #5--fsl) got a lot of nice reviews from people, mainly because she was a female super-hero, and a lot of people have been crying for female super-heroes. So I thought this would be just right--I gave Nova the same powers as E-Man to make them a team, sort of."

In yet a final attempt, Charlton began to use portrait effect covers on their magazines. Unique and quite often beautifully rendered, the portrait effect was come upon with little difficulty.

"We acheived the effect because we started using paintings. We changed our system of covers from the black and white (We used to color-seperate the covers through this outfit in Texas) because we found out that they could color-seperate paintings for the same price that they could do the other ones, so we told our artists to do paintings instead, and Joe liked to do paintings anyway. And that's really what they were, paintings."

But, as we said, E-Man has gone the way of all pulp, to steal a cliche. The book's followers were disappointed, but no more so than E-Man's biggest fan, the talented Nick Cuti himself:

"I was very disappointed that the book didn't make a big success as we'd hoped it would. But aside from that, I think Joe gave a good two-hundred percent effort, and I know I have everything I had. You really have to expect things like that in the comic book business; it's just a part of the whole thing."

And so it ends--or actually, so it doesn't end. The Charlton Bullseye, Charlton Publication's own fan magazine, will be the new home for that creature called E-Man. And it's rather ironic when one considers that a back-up feature (Rog-2000) came from a fanzine, and now a full lead feature is going into a fanzine (Not to mention that detective Mike Mauser is now a back-up strip in one of Charlton's myriad efforts--strange, no?). One has to remember, though, that the life and death of E-Man was not without purpose--it opened up a whole new world of adventure titles at Charlton, one that we hope forms a long, long line of quality attempts. Time, as they say, will tell.

But in the meantime, Nick Cuti offers one last word to the fans and friends of his creation; it's in regard to E-Man's new home:

"With Bullseye, the difference is that it doesn't have to go under the Code, but I doubt it'll change E-Man very much. We'll probably keep him the same basic character as he was in the comics . . . maybe Nova'll get sexier, I don't know."

That might've been the one thing to have saved it . . . !

AN E-MAN CHECKLIST

No.	Date	Title	Artist	Pg
1	10/73	The Beginning	Joe Staton	7
		The Brain and the Bomb (part 2)		9
		The Knight in Operation: Rotten Apple	Tom Sutton	8
2	12/73	The Entropy Twins	Joe Staton	16
		Killjoy in (untitled)	*Steve Ditko	8
3	6/74	The Energy Crisis	Joe Staton	16
		Travis in The Dragon Killer	Wayne Howard	8
4	8/74	City in the Sand	Joe Staton	16
		Killjoy in (untitled)	*Steve Ditko	8
5	11/74	The City Swallower	Joe Staton	16
		Libery Belle in Freedom's Star	**Steve Ditko	8
6	1/75	Wunderworld	Joe Staton	16
		Rog-2000 in That Was No Lady	John Byrne	8
7	3/75	TV Man	Joe Staton	16
		Rog-2000 in Withering Heights	John Byrne	7
8	5/75	The Inner Sun	Joe Staton	23
9	7/75	The Genius Plant	Joe Staton	16
		Rog-2000 in The Wish	John Byrne	7
10	9/75	The Witch of Hog Wallow	Joe Staton	16
		Rog-2000 Vs. the Sog	John Byrne	7

All stories written by Nicola Cuti, except those marked (*), by Steve Ditko, and those marked (**), by Joe Gill. Covers by Joe Staton, except #1, by Nick Cuti/Joe Staton. Painted covers #'s 7-10

COSMIC CROSSROADS

by Mike Friedrich

Foreword from the editor: In the field of professional comic book authors, Mike Friedrich has always remained, despite a more-than-reputable output of work for many years in the industry, a quiet, generally unassuming individual. His past credits, however, tend to speak for him. Having been the scripter for such diverse characters as Batman, Green Lantern, Ka-Zar and Iron Man, his broad experiences offer intriguing insights. After having written for Warlock during that character's first incarnation, Mike went on with Jim Starlin to pull the third attempt at a series for Captain Marvel into a financial reality. Though he feels personally that his connection to the "cosmic" characters has been rather tenuous, his past works and his own somewhat-cosmic magazine, STAR*REACH, say otherwise. Mike's cooperation with us to offer some degree of completeness to NIMBUS TWO's cosmic theme is appreciated.

Why do people read cosmic stories, anyway? For a sense of hope-fulfillment, or adventure, or a religious identification, or pure fantasy, or what? Avoiding the instinct to wonder, "How the hell do I know?" I believe that people read comics for a number of reasons; the first one is fun (the sense of adventure). If there are further applications (interesting new philosophies or insights), that's added on. The "cosmic" scale adds to the fun, hopefully. Cosmic-scope stories offer backgrounds for large-scale concerns (like archetypical Good versus archetypical Evil or the Cosmic Muffin Within Us All). Many people are interested in creating and reading that. Remember, however, that traditional values in the comic books will remain; a lot longer, too, than many imply.

One big question is always: In the long run, would the Messiah concept in the earlier Warlock series have eventually made it if the book had held out? I think that yes, it would have survived and, hopefully, flourished. As I'd planned it, there was a long way to go before the Christ's-life analogy would be played out. I felt in WARLOCK I was writing a basic comic book storyline with an occasional religious overtone. I'm not able to speak for the much more cosmically-oriented strips' creators as to whether or not cosmic adventures are religious.

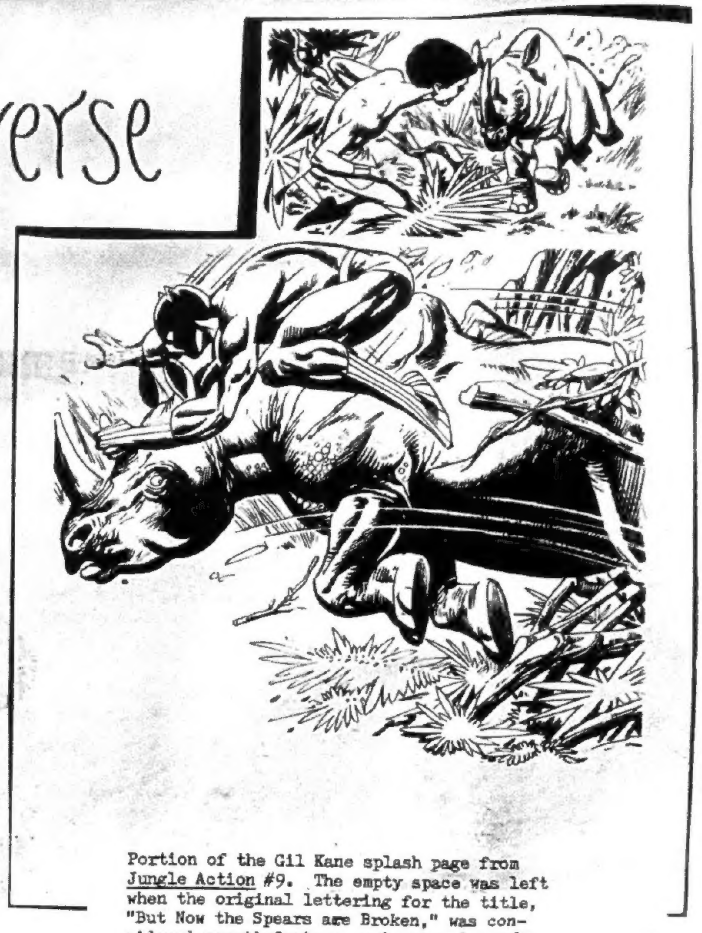
One thing my Warlock and Captain Marvel stories were emphatically NOT is satirical: An attempt was made all around, I believe, to say things about people that weren't possible with other comics' characters. Equally noted, charges that our cosmic stories as such are anti- or pro-Utopia or for or against organized religion, are irrelevant. Starlin's current WARLOCK series appears to me to be anti-establishmentarian vis a vis religion, but that's not the point.

My Warlock books and the cosmic Captain Marvel stories differ greatly. Since no "theme" developed in WARLOCK (other than to see if doing a Christ parallel would be fun and possibly enlightening in the Marvel comics format), one can't contrast it with CAPTAIN MARVEL. CM didn't really have a theme either, except perhaps the "death-wish" of Thanos. As to whether equal values of morality and "godliness" were presented, I would say, off the top, I think CM was "more cosmic" than WARLOCK, whatever that means. Starlin's scope was broader than mine, though (he plotted all the CAPTAIN MARVEL's I wrote).

(continued on page 22)

MY FIRST WARLOCK! FOR YOU! MAY 20 75

Across the Universe



Portion of the Gil Kane splash page from Jungle Action #9. The empty space was left when the original lettering for the title, "But Now the Spears are Broken," was considered unsatisfactory, and was redrawn by Marie Severin. Reader reaction to *NIMBUS ONE*'s "A View Through the Eyes of Wakanda," by Don McGregor and Frank Levasce, received universally some extremely nice reviews.

Take my word for it--there's nothing like a good mail response to his endeavors to make an editor feel fine. Let us hear from you--I've got a lot to learn, and it's been good advice that's been leading us along! Let's take an eyeful from the comments on our first issue--

Dear Sirs:

As I was saying to Jim Van Hise recently, the number of quality article/art fanzines has dwindled painfully in the last six years or so, thus I welcome any new contributions from our Canadian brothers. I liked the variety of articles in your first issue, and I hope you expand into pulps (only good research permitted, however) and comic strips, which have not over the years received proper attention. I enjoyed once again seeing work by my old friend Dave Fryxell, who provided a rare "thoughtful" column. Over the years I have screamed about fan columnists who write correctly and "fannishly," yet never say anything. I got a lot of static when I began my Now What column by producing heavy commentary that a person couldn't read in thirty seconds or less, but now that I have established myself, I feel I must say something meaningful or I have let my readers down. Mr. Fryxell, by starting with McLuen (the medium is the message), got off on the right foot, and although his topic deserves periodic discussion, he "said it all" and must go on next issue. Too many fan topics defy quick and/or satisfactory conclusions, so we must do our best and keep on plugging.

As for editing, I have some comments. The tabloid format demands extra work, and you cannot treat this size like any old fanzine. Use the extra room. Make things big that deserve it and reduce others. Look at how Bill Wilson handled this, or even TBG, if I dare suggest it. A good article/art zine must have good contents and good packaging. You have begun, which is good.

All in all, I enjoyed NIMBUS and I hope you can make a go of it. I thought your back cover was in poor taste, but I can overlook that. Good luck.

Murray Bishoff
East Moline, Ill.

Dear Frank:

As it is, NIMBUS looks like one of the most unique and original zines ever produced in fandom, for several reasons. First, of course, is its unique style of printing. Although we see, quite often, many adzines in tabloid format, rarely is a text and art zine published in such a way. I don't know if it was done for financial reasons or not, but it came off looking quite good.

Secondly, I found the articles within all breaths of fresh air. Finally, someone writes about something other than Jack Kirby and the New Gods or Neal Adams' career. Your features were original and innovative, covering virgin grounds that very possibly kindled many people's interests in a certain field or other. This is especially true with the "Revenge of the Kid Kid," since I've never seen such a comprehensive article on Western comics . . . and not one as interesting. It was excellent, and I definitely stress the usage of such new topics in the future.

Likewise, the lengthy and immensely interesting piece on the Black Panther was superb. Not only did we get a close-up, behind-the-scenes look at "Panther's Rage" and its creator, but we got a very detailed synopsis of the entire series, all handled in a very original manner. It, too, was a job well done.

"Protean Thoughts," although more along the lines of regular fanzine opinion columns than the preceding two features, was nonetheless well-written and entertaining.

As for the artwork in the issue--it ranged from excellent to a few hadish pieces. The Frank Bronco cover was superb, catching the essence of the inside article on the Westerns magnificently; the back cover was a change; Ric Cruz and San de la Rosa's art inside was very well done, and the centerspread by Thom, although a bit messy in some detailed sections, was fantastic; Tim Corrigan's pieces were at least fair, better than some of his other work; and Steve Leialoha's Cap America piece was terrific . . . and it was only a sketch! I'm hoping you'll be able to feature more of his work in future issues, as he must be awaiting printing details. (We ala to please; this issue includes a couple of Steve's talented renditions, including his very first published illustration of Warlock prior to his debut as artist of that character's book --fsl.) In any case, the only part I was disappointed with was the material by Bob Cotter and Steve Gaffel. Although I realize they are both brand new to fandom, their talents are still rather undefined and should be honed up a bit before doing successive fanzine work.

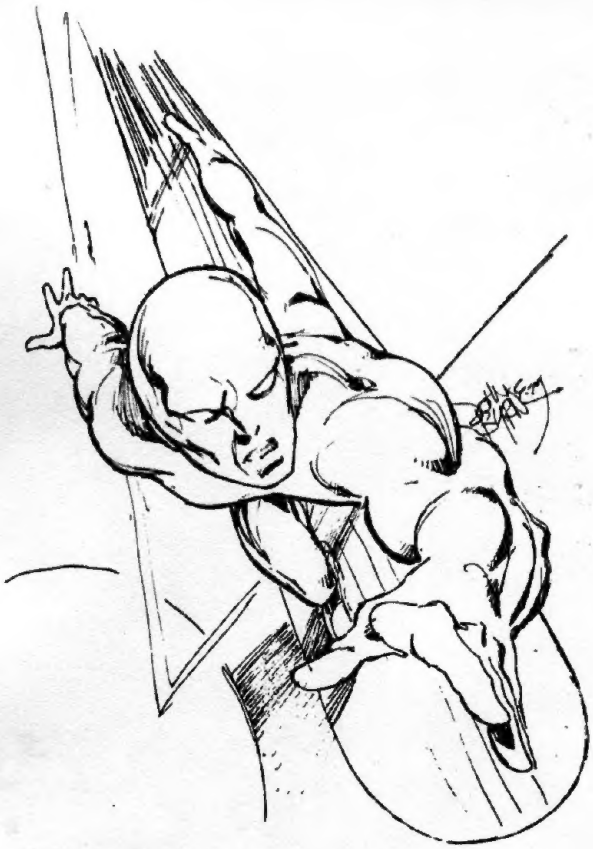
So, all-in-all, NIMBUS was a marvelous production. It's one of the best first issues I've ever seen. And if you can improve with each issue following, you'll have one hell of a first class zine. Keep up the good work, and I wish you luck.

Alan Hoier
Pine Plains, N

Four thanks to a couple of fandom's more outstanding critics. Bish, as you know, published Fandom, and Murray O'Neill writes an intriguing column in FAN. To those a few backs in reply here: Bob and Steve, along with Warrior, are a couple of the new talents

(continued on page 10)

Don Maitz



(continued from page 8)
showcased in NIMBUS ONE, as similarly are Mac Patterson, Karl Kesel, and Hoy Murphey, among others, in this issue. After all, I've certainly been given many, many chances to write and participate in fandom and such by several people who didn't have to go out of their way for me--Paul Kowtiuk and I want to give others that same chance here***Thanks from Pete Gillis on "Revenge of the Kid Kid." He insists on mentioning it's the most comprehensive article on Western comics to date, and I'm not about to stop him!***Sam and Ric's centerspread was presented twice its actual size, and still came out great; reaction, in fact, was so favorable we've asked them to do another for us, this time published original scale. Let us know what you think***And for those of you waiting to see some comments of a more discoursive nature, Dave Fryxell's column, "Protean Thoughts," gets put under the microscope next.)

Dear Frank:

Well, Pete Gillis' recommendation of NIMBUS (I wonder WHY he recommened it, huh?) turned out to be worthwhile, as I enjoyed your first ish more than any other zine in a long, long time. Yeah, I know that sounds overly patronizing, but I mean it. It was a really nice issue.

To begin with Dave Fryxell's piece, he brought up some fine points, but it seemed as though he could've gotten into it a little deeper. While it's true most comic writing is below the level of the art, his suggestion on relying primarily on visual storytelling doesn't seem to be the answer given the artistic talents around. Most comic artists are just that--artists; they're not storytellers. Sure, there's a Buscema, Kane, Kubert, Colan, Kirby, Romita . . . but strong continuity artists such as them are not the usual. Instead, the field is primarily made up of Wrightsons, Milgroms, and Browns who, while all good artists, are not dominent storytellers. The Eisner philosophy only works if the artist can tell the story almost single-handedly. So, strong plotters (as opposed to scripters) seems to me to be the key. Whatever, continuity breakdowns are the main point in getting a story across and in this respect, Dave is on the mark. But I don't feel most current artists can swing it alone.

Of course, the perfect blend is a great artistic storyteller combined with a visually-oriented writer, but those combos are rare. You find them once in a while such as McGregor/Graham, but not every day.

Pete Gillis' article was one of the weirdest I've ever read. Throughout most of it he merely pointed out how poor most Westerns are, and he almost appeared to be apologizing for enjoying them. I STILL don't like Westerns, but at least now I know a lot more about them than I did before reading the article/essay. The point about the basic morality play of good versus evil was the finest one he brought to light, but I felt he should've expanded on it, perhaps even justifying certain strips in those terms. It was an informative piece, but not very moving.

The McGregor article was one of the finest I've seen. It was an interview, but then again, it wasn't. It had an odd flavor to it. Loose, and very informal. Just McGregor thinking aloud, with comments stuck in between. My applause for a beautifully laid out piece.

Well, my congrats on a fine ish, and the best of luck for the future.

Dean Mullaney
Staten Island, NY

(Thanks for your incisive comments, Dean. Quick aside: As Dave mentions in his column this issue, cinematic technique seems to be an inherently good factor in an artist's storytelling style. Close production rapport between the strip writer and artist generally leads to that cinematic flow, for the cinema is an ingrained part of most modern creative artists. The variety will always be open [Steve Ditko drew, say, Spider-Man's shadowy night scenes much like Fritz Lang directed "M"; Jack Kirby's occasional rendering of the character was more like Orson Wells. Those might be somewhat grandiose analogies, but for the purpose of comparison, they'll do]. The point is that there're a lot of ways to achieve that elusive cinematic flow [as Don McGregor mentions in this issue's interview], and as time progresses, as creative artists [including writers, colorists, et al.] have more and more of an inherent mental backlog to be influenced by and referenced to, storytelling in the comics will probably reach that point as the rule, rather than as the exception--and stop snickering, Fryxell!! If Hogarth, Foster, Eisner and all the rest were already do-that thirty years ago, that's their business!)

Dear Frank:

I was impressed, visually, by *NIMBUS ONE*. Glancing through the issue I noticed that my suggestions were indeed taken into consideration and I thank you for that, and also for that totally unnecessary acknowledgement in your editorial (you want me to get a swelled head or something?). Care was apparently taken with layouts and copy preparation, and with a few minor exceptions I won't take time to detail here, all of the artwork was good and appropriate, particularly Cruz/de la Rosa's fantastic centerspread. I've only read your editorial and Fryxell's piece; both impressed me. Yours for its subtle and deftly-handled introduction preceeding the usual first issue outline; Dave's for his always honest, sometimes biting criticism, highlighted by your commentary and his schizo interludes. (Whaddya mean schizo, Wilson? Why don't you get this damned letter over with so I can go back to sleep and not have to listen to that clickety-clack typewriter?)

That's it; I have to leave. After all, two heads are better than one! (Now you're gettin' smart, kid!)
Best regards,

Bill Wilson
Clairton, Penn.

(When I first took this job, Paul told me to expect anything! Seriously, though, Bill, we appreciate your interest and wish you, as always, best of luck in your own endeavors for Mediascene and the Elfland Chronicles. Most of our readers don't know this, but when I started out doing this zine, Bill Wilson, late of the fantastic The Collector, gave us help and inspiration, even amidst his busy schedule, more times than we can count. He'd probably kill me for printing all this, but Bill is as great a man as he is talented, and I value our correspondent friendship very much. And now, if we stop this mutual admiration society and get back to work, we might actually accomplish something! Lastly, we got one letter that I simply had to excerpt from, as you'll see why when you read it . . . !)

Dear Frank:

. . . NIMBUS ONE was just great. That Pete Cillis strings words together like firecracker bursts on the fourth of July!

Marshall Dwight
Atlanta, Ga.

(I mean, what can I say!)

The Original Cosmic Character—

An Interview with God

Conducted by Peter B. Gillis

Foreword:

The assignment came down from the highest echelons of NIMBUS itself, that mysterious room in West Virginia--"We've got a lead," it said simply. "Track it down." I readied myself—we'd been waiting for this for a long, long time. Our search was about to end.

There was no secretary in the front office, so I buzzed for Him myself. At the sound of a cheerful "Come in!" I opened the large, oaken door and with the utmost caution walked into the main room itself. He was seated behind a desk that was free from clutter in a room that might have been any executive's. He was about fifty or so, with brown hair cut conservatively, and a pleasant face that reminded me a bit of Spencer Tracy in "Captain Courageous." He asked me to sit down, and I hauled out my recorder. After a few hesitant attempts at idle chatter (but what does one chat about with God?) we began the interview.

NIMBUS: The purpose of my coming here today is basically to ask what You think of portraying God, Yourself, in comic books. By this I don't mean in stories as from the Bible or church-produced comics, but using You as a character in adventure-type comics. Do You think, first, that it can be done, and if so, how?

GOD: Well, first of all, insofar as portraying goes, you run up against a problem. Laying comic books aside for the moment, an artist, now, can never even portray any object fully, let alone Yours Truly. In any artistic attempt at portrayal—imitation, really, for art is merely an imitation of nature; artificial, so to speak—an infinite number of things must be left out. There's no such thing as a "complete picture." If it were truly complete, then it wouldn't be a picture any longer. What you're looking for is a portrayal that contains no lies, even if it doesn contain certain omissions. I think that is, at least, quite possible--human beings are capable of some real insights.

NIMBUS: The problem has been broached by comic writers in general, that while portrayals of mythological gods are easy, you start stepping on dangerous ground when it comes to doing something about the One God.

GOD: Well, I didn't say it would be easy. Of course you're going to step on people's toes if you start to express your own views of God. That's why you should never discuss religion, my boy (laughter). But really, any artistic expression usually turns out controversial if it's good and deeply felt.

NIMBUS: Yes, you're quite right. (pause) The comic book writers themselves feel hesitant about putting God as a character because their version might differ from the deeply-held positions of many--perhaps most—of the readers.

GOD: Well, *of course you can't even mention God without stepping on something. There is a problem inherent in* that, and it's *not like coming out against the Viet-*Nam War. Many people center their whole lives around what they think I am—and it's their most cherished belief. Offend that, and they give you no mercy.

NIMBUS: Like "Godspell," for example?

GOD: Right. I thought it was a nice little musical, and yet people were offended because it didn't portray (and there's that word again) Jesus Christ's resurrection. There's a kind of vehemence that surrounds all this.

NIMBUS: But, as You see it, is there any way that God, Yourself, should/could be . . . well, portrayed?

GOD: Okay, now: Do you want me to give you the authoritative answer so you can be right and all the others can be wrong?

NIMBUS: Well, yes, sort of . . . .

GOD: You realize, of course, that my telling you would do you exactly no good? People have been claiming to have gotten The Truth directly from Me since prehistory. Or maybe (pause) maybe you want Me to make people believe you by giving you the power to calm the storm and raise the dead?
(There was a very great, uncomfortable silence. This guy spoke with incredible force and incisiveness, as well as great gentleness. I was almost beginning to believe he was who he said he was, or at least an emissary. But whoever he was, he was also completely right.)

NIMBUS: Maybe--you could just give me the basis and let people make up their own minds?

GOD: Is that what you want?

NIMBUS: Well, actually, no—or wait a second, this is getting too confusing for me. Just tell me: Is it, in fact, possible to portray You in the comics; do You think it's possible?

GOD: Yes, I do.

NIMBUS: But you're not going to tell me how?

GOD: I didn't say that. I said it would be fruitless to

(continued on third page following—centerspread's next!)

BROOM!!
Sam de la Rosa
R. CRUZ
10

(continued from page 11)
give you hard and fast revelations, the "Real Truth," you might say, on how to portray me . . . you know, like whether I support the Catholic Church in its dogma, whether Aristotle lives in Heaven or Hell, and so forth. I can, however, give you some guidelines on how to approach God, how to think about partially portraying him.

NIMBUS: I suppose that's what I really wanted all along.

GOD: (chuckles) I know. But it's not all that complicated, you see, because really, Peter, the very simplest way to portray God in a comic book is to write a good story about love, love and the sense of wonder that goes with it, because when you have love, when you have everything that goes with love, you'll retain that ever-present hope of something greater and more beautiful in this existence than just surviving day by day. It's love, right? And that's the God you meet on the street every day and don't know.

NIMBUS: Yeah, well . . . that's not really as a character, though . . . . Are You saying that God can't appear other than as a force, or a power?

GOD: What do you want, then, a Super-Odin who appears in thunder and lightning?!

NIMBUS: Now, wait a minute; I mean, can't man or, to be specific, a super-hero like, say, the Ghost Rider or something, ever look for outside aid against nemeses like Satan when all natural, mortal resources are gone? As an enemy of Satan, don't You, well . . . work miracles?

GOD: First off, I am no one's enemy. Are you talking about Tony Isabella's handling of me in Ghost Rider? It was a good, cute story, and if you'd read it, it would've illustrated something to you. But let me tell you here about Satan. Satan, or whatever name he might choose to go under, is a creature of mine, as are all things. However, Satan viewed me as the center of a circle, controlling everything around. Things aren't quite that simple. Anyway, he thought that he could duplicate that feat by amassing power and things unto himself. That was how he began to build Hell. There was no great war in Heaven, no fiery plummeting, no vengeance on my part. His Lordship over Hell was his own idea. And the reason why Hell is Hell is because it is finite, because it never opens onto anything greater than itself, because it has no love, no wonder, no hope. I am NOT Satan's enemy: He is The Enemy. And as Tony so nicely put it, I am "a friend."

NIMBUS: Hmmm. Excuse me for being brash, but that sounded an awful lot like some "hard and fast" revelations to *me. Don't tell me you slipped and started telling me the "Real Truth"?*

GOD: And don't tell Me you're beginning to think I really am God and not just a crazy old man who thinks he's God! No, I'm not giving you the straight dope on the universe, but presenting you with a new point of view. I'm very fond of discourse, you know, where both sides don't simply fight over differing positions, but, through talking with each other, come up with really new thoughts. That's partly what I'm doing. It really is funny that this is called "playing the Devil's advocate." It's definitely not what he stands for.

NIMBUS: You wouldn't lie to me, would you?

GOD: You're asking me? What if I told you I didn't? I could be lying to you then.

NIMBUS: Now that's a concept that is absolutely chilling to me . . . God, lying to people. Do you play games with us, then, manipulate us as we manipulate rats? Why then, everything we know could be a lie, and we wouldn't know it!
(Why I said all that, I still don't know. There was an uncomfortable pause. I was literally shivering--all of a sudden, doubt overwhelmed me, robbing me of any firm leg to stand on. Frankly, I was pretty scared. God's brow wrinkled as He watched me. Then he spoke.)

GOD: (very low, very controlled) I could not lie to Myself, because that would mean hating Myself, what I am. You know that nature lies to your senses with optical illusions and such--I can do that, too. But I cannot lie to Myself, and not to Myself inside you . . . the love, the wonder, the beauty. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know." John Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn (he smiled).

NIMBUS: I think I see. The whole reason for Your existence, then . . .

GOD: Don't tread on thin ice.

NIMBUS: Hmmmm, maybe You're right. But, solid and sincere truth--would that be your form, or is it based on love, or wonder, or . . . what?

GOD: Well, of course you should realize that God appears in many forms, and that no one form would do. The thing you should see in God when He appears is the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, He opens up onto something that is greater than Himself, or the way He appears there and then. That's what should be the keystone: Implication. Infinite implication. God can appear--does appear--both great and small. But no matter how great and grand, there is always something greater down deep--just as with Satan there is always something smaller, meaner, down deep. Those are the faces of God.

NIMBUS: I'm not sure I can accept that.

GOD: Good. No more than you should accept the fact that I'm God and not merely a middle-aged businessman . . .

NIMBUS: Businessperson?

GOD: (laughter) Right. Really, I've done and said nothing than an ordinary mortal couldn't have said.

NIMBUS: But, you know, I don't think that fact is all that relevant--it's the growth, the growth of the idea, the thought . . .

GOD: . . . Is more important than angels and lightning bolts. Exactly. If it weren't, Satan would have been right all along. You've done quite nicely.

NIMBUS: I think it'll be a good interview, anyway; just one more thing I'd like to ask, though.

GOD: Go ahead.
(He began to get up from his chair to see me out. For a moment, I hesitated--but still . . .)

NIMBUS: If You are God--You are, aren't You?--could You, well, give me some assurance; You know, maybe a . . . a sign?

GOD: A sign? But what sign could I give you to show that I was God? I could really be Odin, masquerading as God! If I blotted out the sun and caused water to flow uphill, that wouldn't prove I was God, would it?

NIMBUS: Yeah, I guess I do realize that. But couldn't You do something, just as a gesture? Please. It's important to me.

GOD: (nodding) I know, my friend. This crazy, old business . . . person knows that the customer is always right. So I'll simply do this.
(And with that, He walked softly out the door of the office, out into the hall, down the stairs and into the street. The only thing was, He didn't leave, He never did leave me. And I'm guessing He never will. Not Him. You figure it out.)

Editorial addition: *Here's something I ran into while glancing through a good book lately . . . .*

Love virtue, you who are judges on earth;
Let honesty prompt your thinking about the Lord.
Seek Him in simplicity of heart;
Since He is to be found by those who
Do not put him to the test,
He shows Himself to those who do not distrust Him.

The Book of Wisdom (Old Test.), 1:1-2

The Worlds of Don McGregor

an interview with the author of KILLRAVEN

IF I HAD TEN THOUSAND WORDS AT MY DISPOSAL, they wouldn't be enough to describe Don McGregor. He's both an idealist in a field of cynics and a realist in the midst of rampant impracticality. He loves his destiny-appointed roles as a writer, and clings to his sharply-honed talents as a jeweler might the Genevieve Ruby. His every movement in the comics field seems to touch off controversey at one angle or another--but little good is accomplished without controversey, and giants can only be toppled by David's of sincerity and foresight. Our thanks go to him, of course, for this immense interview--but to go one step further, I thank him for a truly treasured friendship. I take this written opportunity to tell him that because, being somewhat a communication apprehensive, I'd hate to have to tell him that to his face--but in any case, I enjoyed interviewing him, and I hope you enjoy the results.

NIMBUS: What were your ideas for characterizations and direction when you first took over the strip?

DON: Initially, when I started out doing the "Killraven" series (which was called "War of the Worlds" at the time) I had just thought that I would keep it a simple comic book, write it as my comic book comic book. Herb Trimpe was drawing the strip at the time; Herb's major strength, I think, as a comic book artist is his strength in caricature. He'd given a kind of caricaturist identity, visually, to several of the freemen that were there with Killraven. With the exception of M'Shulla, none of the characters really had names (I think there was someone named Hawk, but it was just for one panel or something in one of Gerry's books). So I decided I would give all the characters names, so that the freemen hanging around Killraven would be a solid, basic unit for the readers to identify with. For my first book, that was the major consideration. Herb had come up with some very interesting caricatures--"Old Skull" came very easily. Visually, he just seemed to fit the kind of character he was going to be. I wanted a character that would remind readers that everything doesn't have to be complex, that there's nothing wrong with a little simplicity at times.

I didn't really confer with anybody when I took over "War of the Worlds"; I concluded a story with characters Marv had introduced, but I really had no idea of what Marv had intended to do with them. And actually, when I was first given the strip, my first immediate thought was--"What the hell am I gonna do with this strip??" It kind of frightened me because I didn't have anything for it, but now I have something like the next twelve plots already in mind, so I pretty much know where the strip is headed; I don't have the plots actually detailed out, but I have the basic ideas and concepts and themes that the book might be going after. Which is not to say that other books might not come in between if something else would suit its purpose there.

NIMBUS: What was it like, at first, working with Herb Trimpe's story-telling style?

DON: I was able to inject a lot more humor into Herb's stuff, especially the action scenes. Also, one of the things in working with Herb was that he always put the characters all around; that gave me much more of a chance to develop them. A lot of times, when you're handling a strip that has a number of characters in it, the artist might not always give you the characters. Herb was always throwing them into the background, whihh meant that I was always coming up with dialogue for them. Now, some might say that was largely due to overcopy (laughter), but in another way it was something to develop the characters and spend a lot more time with them. For example, at the (New York Comic Art) Con, Craig (Russell) and I went to see "Metropolis." I sat there watching the film with Craig, and I realized one of the things that worked about the film--and about any film--is that it forced you to go at its own pace; in other words, you can't rush it, you have to take all that expository stuff, you have to get into the characters, you have to get into the situations, because it is then they unveil the things that are going to happen. Now, to some extent you can do that in a comic book, but it's really limited because you have maybe ten, fifteen minutes that a person may be spending reading that book. One thing you might notice is that I really try to make the copy heavier in the beginning of the book, and I try to do that for a lot of reasons: I have to reintroduce the situation, reintroduce the characters, and I have to get into a whole new and seperate theme, and that takes time. The second thing is to make the readers spend some time getting into it so that after six or seven pages they basically have gotten into the situation and have had a chance to identify somewhat with one or more of the characters, or at least to understand who they are--and then let the story start to form in the readers' minds.

NIMBUS: What's been influencing the writing style of "War of the Worlds/Killraven"?

DON: Well, one of the major influences on my scripting there is the artist I'm working with. Obviously, it's not now the strip Herb Trimpe was drawing, nor the one that Rich Buckler or Gene Colan drew. It's a much different strip, and that's because of the fact that I can get visual ideas of concepts that I want to try, and then Craig takes them even further--other than just giving me what I want or not giving me enough, he gives me even more, and I'll stand there in awe and say, "Oh geez, I gotta do something with these pages!" Craig's incredible to work with that way, because he's dedicated in putting out a book that's important to him. Do you mean by (your question) writers that have influenced me?

NIMBUS: Well, that's part of it, yeah.

DON: I imagine there's some comic book influence there, and I imagine it would be Stan. But it probably would be a minor part, not so much the writing part but in my ideas somewhat of structure.

As to actual writing style, let's see . . . I really

(continued next page)

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enjoy the work of Evan Hunter--also known as Ed McBain--and John D. MacDonald as well.

NIMBUS: Is there a lot of yourself embodied in the writing, or in the lead character, Killraven?

DON: Not too much in the character per se, but in the themes, obviously. You're going to notice a real--I don't know--change . . . I know some of the stuff's been involved with the personal problems that are bothering me now--and some of it will be in the books, because my writing is always trying to work things out. But not only for me--It's like taking problems that are obviously common to all the people around me. For example, I'd like to do a story on the break-up of the family unit, because that's something that's not only happening to me, but happening to a lot of people. It'd be interesting to try and get people to understand some of the things that are happening to us. Does that make sense to you?

NIMBUS: Makes a lot of sense to me; I can't really talk for anyone else, though. Still . . . .

DON: It's like when I started doing "A Death in the Family," and I realized that part of it was turning out to be just that theme. I started out with the opening caption: "Who killed the family unit?" Was it the Martians, or had it already died before the Martians came down? It's disintegrating a lot of ways around us, and be that good, bad, or indifferent, I don't know--but I think it's unfortunate, especially for the very young kids as well as the adults going through it. So I intend, in some of my stuff, to get into that.

NIMBUS: That's really something; I hope you can get your point across. The freemen might themselves be something of a family unit. What can you tell us, then, about the interplay between Killraven and M'Shulla?

DON: (laughter) I hate revealing this, but there are people who already know it. I'm very much influenced--I shouldn't say "influenced," I have a great deal of love for--the old "I Spy" television series with Robert Culp and Bill Cosby. And to a degree, Killraven and M'Shulla have the camaraderie and respect for each other that those characters did. So there's a bit of them in there, but I wouldn't want people to think that they're only Culp and Cosby, they're much, much more. I think in a way they relate a little bit more to the common person--I know that because of the distance of putting them in a future time and putting them into a situation that is totally alien to the things that are happening to us now, it sometimes might alienate audiences to being able to identify with them. But I think their past and their make-up--who and what they are--make them identifiable enough for people to get into. And it depends on different readers reacting to different characters--so one person might like Hawk, one person might like Old Skull, one person might hate Old Skull; it's a diverse reaction. About the only really constant thing is that nobody wanted to lose Mint Julip, nobody wanted to lose Sabre, and nobody wanted to lose Volcana Ash. And one of the things I wanted to say was: Those characters'll probably come back, but I want to go on and do a few other, new things. We have a character coming up called Mourning Prey, and the title of the story she appears in is "The Morning After Mourning Prey." We watch her metamorphosize from a caterpillar type of slug to a very gorgeous, voluptuous female who's part butterfly. This tales place in the Okenefenokee Swamp, and it's kind of an interesting story.

NIMBUS: Isn't the Okenefenokee Swamp a bit off the track to Yellowstone?

DON: Oh, they're 'way off the track! (laughter) They got lost back in the "Monuments" issue (Amazing Adventures #31--fsl). Nashville (AA #32) was off the track, too. It was something Carmilla had said . . . Dave Kraft when he read the book asked, "What did Carmilla mean by, 'By the way, M'Shulla says we should tell you we're lost'?" And he was trying to read a deeper meaning into it, when all I meant was, "Gang, I don't know where we are, we got lost while we were running away!" But I was going for something else with the next line when I said, "In one way or another, aren't we all?" And I think in one way or another we are all lost, all of us leaning psychologically to our environment and we're all trying to get through somehow, and that was the point I was attempting to make. Unfortunately, maybe I messed up that line--I thought that line sufficiently stood by itself, and I thought that people understood that Carmilla was the one who'd been leading them cross-country. That was pretty well-established, but it's just one of those cases where really, I blew it--I should've either put a few more words or I should've tried to do something that would really clarify it. Craig when he read it thought it was evident, but when you're working closely with someone, you can sometimes get thoughts across to each other more easily than conveying them to the reader.

One of the things you probably want to get into is that the strip has taken on a much more cosmic or a much more s-f viewpoint to it than it had before, and that's rather directly because of Craig, because I know I can come up with things, can say, "Let's do this," or, "Let's try that," and then Craig will be able to just go ahead and do it. He's an enormously talented artist in his sense of design, his sense of imagination, his sense, even, of pacing and story-telling. He's improving in all those areas tremendously, so it's almost gotten to a point now where I feel I could give Craig any kind of story--it doesn't matter what type of story it was--and he could keep it visually exciting, and the narrative would be striking the point home, and it would have a dramatic impact. I think I may have mentioned this once before, but science-fiction, above all, must have emotional impact. Comics most often don't have emotional impact, and we need it. We need to make people cry, or laugh, or angry, or something, but move people, get them to react to the damn thing, don't let them sit there and read through the book and throw one down and pick up the next one: Let's get some kind of reaction--that's what story-telling is about. I think comics can do it, but we're restricted by the things I've mentioned before, like time limit. You've got at most eighteen pages (by the way, most of them are cut down to seventeen now, the word just came down), and you realize you have such a short amount of time to get the people involved not only in the story, not only in the situation, not even only in the characters, but involved emotionally. You've got to make the reader take time out from his life to get involved in these characters.

NIMBUS: How have the reactions been to your work so far?

DON: I think that's one of the things that go over strongly--the reactions are great, and they help me. I have weak points in my writing, but I think (the reactions have verified to me) that one of the strongest things is the passion involved, the sense of caring. One of the things hanging me up now about the writing is that I'm going through this emotional problem personally, and it's very difficult to seperate myself from what is happening and to put all my emotional energy into my work. Right now it's only people that are helping me get through this, get me back to my writing. Also, I don't want to starve to death! (laughter)

NIMBUS: Some of your other characters now--what can you tell us about Carmilla Frost and Grok?

DON: They were presented in the first issue I did. The strip didn't seem to me to have covered very much of a future sense, not only in terms of a future shock, but in scientific history--a lot of amazing things would have happened by then, and so Grok and Carmilla came about to illustrate that. Also, I wanted to introduce a strong woman character who would not only have strength, but sensitivity. She wouldn't be Red Sonja, let's say. There's nothing wrong with Red Sonja, but what I mean is that she would have physical strength as well as understanding and compassion. When I first saw Carmilla, she was nothing of what I wanted; so I introduced Mint, and worked with Johnny Romita designing the costume so she would look like the kind of character I wanted, that the readers would respond to not only because she's very striking visually, but also because she would be very graceful. Volcana, on the other hand, came about when I wanted to see if I could do a combination of Emma Peal and Mae West. They were the two major inspirations for Volcana's character. But you have to understand when I give you things like that it doesn't mean it's the whole basis in character; there's much more to Volcana, and if you read the books I think you'll realize there's a lot more to her than just being Emma Peal and being able to knock guys around, or being Mae West and being able to make a few double-entendres. Those things, I thought, made her kind of interesting visually and sometimes narratively, but her character is much deeper than that.

NIMBUS: What about Grok? Did you have a nightmare about Heinlein, or what?

DON: Well, Grok goes into the whole futuristic thing, because I wanted to get into cloning. There're a lot of things about cloning that are really striking, and obviously I haven't done much with it yet. But in the origin of Grok, which is drawn up now and, yes, is set to be revealed in "A Death in the Family," we'll finally get into it, and we'll actually see the whole cloning process. I think one of the reasons people don't know who Grok is is that they don't really understand what cloning is. And I want to get a little more into that, and show exactly how it came about.

I used the name "Grok" because it is a term used in *STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND*, and it tells quite a bit. Carmilla named Grok "Grok"--it's not his real name, and the reason is that it was a term of hope for her; and she had read the book. She is motivated by that, and she calls him that because she is very hopeful that Grok's life will not be (later on) what it is at this point in life.

To me, Grok's identity seems pretty obvious--I mean, I've stated it so many times. A lot of people have already guessed it, and I can't understand how you didn't get it, Frank. (Sheesh, how embarassing!--fsl)

NIMBUS: One of the strong points of the "Killraven" strip is said to be the narrations's attitude toward our present day life and sociological peculiarities. What does the author have to say about that?

DON: Well, let's go into a little bit of discussion, something to think about. There were twenty-five years or more before the Martians attacked between our present time until the events of "2001" wouldn't roll around. There had to be changes on the planet Earth by that time. The strip had never really established any of that--they were climbing into old trucks and stuff, and all of it was almost anachronistic. But in twenty-five years, there're gonna be a lot of changes. And the narration, commenting on the past--actually our future--helps bring a lot of it out. Another thing about a science-fiction strip is that when you establish something, you must be consistent, you can't forget it was there. In "The Legend Assassins" (AA #23--fsl), the mural-phonics system was introduced, and Killraven was strapped to it for his death to be felt by all the people. Such a thing as the mural-phonics system existed now, and the Martians had used it; it was obvious we'd probably run into it again. That's why, in "The Devil's Marauder" (AA #24--fsl), later, we have Hobie talking about what Killraven experienced in "The Legend Assassins." I think in TV shows, even in comics a lot of times--maybe not so much at Marvel--but especially in the old days, writers introduce something for a character because it works for a particular episode, and then drop it or forget it, and other writers begin working on it, or whatever the case may be. But what happens is that it begins to destroy the credibility of the characters for the people who really watch or read them all the time. If you introduce something, then it's there; you can't pretend later that it didn't exist. Really, everything keeps relating back to personal events that happen to you, they're a part of your life, a part of your make-up. So I was trying to establish something like that. I had no idea at the time I did the original story "The Legend Assassins" that I would be using the mural-phonics system again; I had no idea I would be using it again for Hawk in "Only the Computer Shows Me Any Respect" (AA #32--fsl). But when I started working out the whole concept of "Only the Computer . . . ." I wanted all the different kinds of fantasies, so that seemed to be perfect. It also hit me that it was a great way to reintroduce Hodiah Twist for a couple of pages for the people who were clamboring to see him--and honestly, it ended up as the basis for a story, and if Marvel comes back with its horror books, that story will probably see print. I also have a sort of Agatha Christie type of thing going about murder in an elevated express in New York City, 1959. Dead bodies keep dropping all over the place, so . . . . (laughter)

NIMBUS: Okay, that sounds fine! (laughter)

DON: By the way, it's called "The Hero Killers."

NIMBUS: (pause) That sounds like one of your titles.

DON: (laughter) I have the theme pretty well down, something I did want to get into--I think in a way we're killing off our heroes. There's some good and there's some bad in that, and I kind of want to examine what's good and what's bad about it.

NIMBUS: So Joltin' Joe has left and gone away . . . . Instead of your heroes, let's talk about your villains for a while. Are they embodiments of ideas, vehicles for particular themes, let's say, or are they something more?

DON: No, I don't think they're just embodiments of ideas --all the characters in some way, I suppose, can be vehicles for themes or thematic points of view. Most of the time the villains have had a depth of character, as much as you can sometimes give them. They're not around as much as the heroes. The heroes you can keep embellishing upon, you can keep giving little facets about them that the reader didn't know before. A lot of times, for a villain who's only in one or two books, it's very difficult to do, because you're stuck with the conflict, and the point of the villain coming in is that there has to be a conflict. I think the villains that came off as the most interesting were Atalon and a little less so the Sacrificer. No letter came in that caught it, but the gynecologist that worked on Mint Julip--in the experiment that created Mint--is the Sacrificer. It's right down there in black and white! Anyway, the most fascinating concept about the Sacrificer that gets to me is his whole change in character--here is a person who obviously, before the Martians attacked, was dedicated to bringing life into the world, and becomes so radically twisted and altered now that he does just the opposite--and he still sees it as a work of art.

Atalon had so many personal quirks that I think he came off much more interestingly. His compulsions were so damned obvious you couldn't help but really hate the son of a bitch. The Sacrificer, as a matter of fact, did

(continued on next page)

Rogues Gallery: The perpetrators of KILLRAVEN, and some friends. Artist Craig Russell is at foreground left, and author Don McGregor takes up the right corner. The rest shall be nameless in respect to their identities; we'll mention that the bearded lad smiling at us is Rich Bruhin, though, just to be nasty!

(Continued from last page)
many, many worse things than Atalon, but because they happened off-camera, because they were kind of suggested, the reader didn't despise him half as much. I mean, here's The Sacrificer butchering babies, and here's Atalon just pushing somebody's face in the mud! But, you see Atalon push the guy's face in the mud, you see the way he treats the people and take them so callously up to the Altar of the Sacrificer. It doesn't make him a much better person, but it makes you hate him, I think, a little bit more than the Sacrificer; so that when Atalon finally gets it, I wanted to do a whole build-up--and I think it came off pretty well.

NIMBUS: What can you say about your most prominent villain in the series, Skar?

DON: Well, with Skar, in a way, I wanted to make a classic villain, one that would run through the whole series. In "A Death in the Family," Killraven and Skar have their final meet, and I think in terms of classic combat issues just from a point of view of what Craig has done, this book is really gonna . . . ! (excitedly) What I would love to have is to have people throw the book down on page five and write me angry letters--and then write another letter after they finish reading the book. It would be the ultimate thing, it would really mean they got so pissed off at what I did by page five that they couldn't wait, they had to get to a typewriter and say, "You son of a bitch!" (laughter) or whatever . . . .

NIMBUS: Would you say there's something of a strong vengeance motif in "A Death in the Family"?

DON: To some extent. A lot of people will be very, very angry at "A Death in the Family," and not just for the obvious reasons. Much of literature, and much of comics especially--not only in America but in the whole world--is taken with revenge motives. I handled that theme in "The Devils' Marauder." A lot of people asked, "What is that one word Killraven akks when he stands over Hobie's body?"

NIMBUS: I imagine it'd be "Why?"--or at least that's the way I interpreted it.

DON: Right. But a lot of people didn't get it. They just--they came up with all kinds of things. The question he asked was "Why?" I thought it was fairly obvious. I mean, Killraven's vengeance-attack and Hobie's death didn't accomplish anything: Hobie died. The one thing *Killraven could've hoped for was to get Hobie out alive . . . and he didn't.*

NIMBUS: Allow me to diverse for a personal observation. Your whole handling of Hobie's character in the Martian tripod plant was, I thought, quite expertly done--especially the bit where he was kicked in the head by Skar and " . . . squints through starred glass, knowing he'll spend the rest of his life squinting in that manner," because the Martians, after all, are not going to supply anyone with prescription lenses.

DON: What's interesting about it is that Hobie had glasses because he wasn't supposed to be real muscular, and Rich drew him like a super-hero. And I said, "Rich, we've gotta do something!" So we gave him glasses and then somebody wrote in and asked if we were killing Roy Thomas in that story!

NIMBUS: Have you been satisfied with your work thus far?

DON: I'm seldom satisfied with a whole book; sometimes I'm satisfied with sections that I think really work and when I know I'm coming through. A couple I can think of --and I hate to get into this, because it's "Panther's Rage"--are like the scenes with Taku going after Karnaj (Jungle Action #11--fsl), a page by itself, an entity that works. It didn't need to have a lot of writing on it--- it had been led up to enough; I thought the readers were exposed enough so that when they got up to that point it didn't need much more.

NIMBUS: Do you feel that way about the death scenes in "A Death in the Family"?

DON: The death scene to me--if that scene doesn't work, then I don't know what the hell is going to work. It's like the cover with the Black Panther in the mouth of a dinosaur--if that cover didn't sell, then I wouldn't know what's going to sell. It was a dynamite cover, an exciting cover, a cover that's going to work. I notice that it's been used two or three times since! (laughter)

NIMBUS: Right! But what do you think about the covers that have been gracing Amazing Adventures?

DON: Not much with the early issues--God, I'm surprised the book survived at all. When we reprinted the one with the rats (AA #23, reprinted in #30--fsl), the cover I wanted to use was a close shot on Killraven with this huge
(continued on page 20)

THE HELL DESTROYERS! PAGE TWELVE

1.
ADAM 1: If that's true, the nightmares finally over.
EVE 1: It's time to wake up.
EVE 2: You were always the pessimist, my darling.
ADAM 2: How many times, laying in the mud, did I wish for these words. Eve? I can hardly believe they're true.
EVE 3: (Now that I've heard them, icy thinking spring would never come again, I'll sleep.)
EVE 4: And not to depress you, but the contractions are coming every five minutes now.

2.
KILLRAVEN 5: Do you think you could ask him to take a detour?
KILLRAVEN 6: Old Skull, help Adam and Eve to those snow skimmers.
VOL 7: What you got there, Red? You commandeer it, Hawk.
KILLRAVEN 8: It's called an ionic blade, Volcana. But this is not the time for questions. Have one of those skimmers ready to go by the time I get there or you'll become an inferno...permanently.

3.
OLD SKULL 9: Old Skull hopes you drive these things better'n M'Shulls, Hawk. M'Shulls some kinda crazy nut when he drives a machine.

4.
TYPESET: The ionic blade is a particularly nasty weapon. Its developer, probably some 20th Century graduate from the big city J.D. gaaaa, decided that a knife, though having a great psychological effect on its victim, was not deadly enough, and devised a blade that sent its wound past its steel length.. The ionic blade, for instance, need only pierce the outer layer of skin to be lethal. Its energy rips outward, past and through whatever organs are in its path. Seeing as this kind of thing can get out hand, it also has a handy regulator which lets its user decide just how deep he wants to run his victim through. In this case, the victim is inanimate, but the effects are no less lethal. it penetrates into plasma interims of the reactor, upsetting the delicate balance. Before Killraven can clear the room, the containment has shattered, the floor beneath his feet begins to quake.

HAWK: How much time have we got?
VOL: If we'd left five minutes ago, we were too late.

A sample first draft script page by Don McGregor, taken from Amazing Adventures #29. Below, a checklist.

WAR OF THE WORLDS/KILLRAVEN CHRONOLOGY

(in "Amazing Adventures")	Title	Penciller	Inker
Date			
5/73	The War of the Worlds	Howard Chaykin/ Neal Adams-Howard Chaykin	Frank McLaughlin
7/73	The Slaves of 7th Avenue	Howard Chaykin	Frank McLaughlin
9/73	The Warlord Strikes	Herb Trimpe	Frank Giacoia
11/73	The Mutant Slavers	Herb Trimpe	Yolanda Pijoka
1/74	Washington Nightmare	Herb Trimpe	Frank Chiaramonte
3/74	The Legend Assassins	Herb Trimpe	Frank Chiaramonte
5/74	For He's a Jolly Dead Rebel	Herb Trimpe	Jack Abel
7/74	The Devil's Marauder	Rich Buckler	Klaus Janson
9/74	The Vengeance Threshold	Gene Colan	Dan Adkins
11/74	Something Worth Dying For	Craig Russell	Jack Abel
1/75	The Death Freedom	Craig Russell	Craig Russell
3/75	The Hell Destroyers	Craig Russell	Craig Russell
5/75	The Rebels of January and Beyond (reprinted material from "Amazing Adventures" #'s 23-26)	Craig Russell	Dan Adkins
7/75	The Day the Monuments Shattered	Craig Russell	Craig Russell
9/75	Only the Computer Shows No Fear	Don McGregor	Dan Green
11/75	Lonely Death Rises Out	Bill Mantlo	D. Bruce Berry
1/76	A Death in the Family	Don McGregor	Craig Russell

Note: Bonelle covers, 18, 26; Chaykin cover, 19; Trimpe covers, 20-23; Buckler cover, 24; Starlin cover, 27; Russell covers; 28, 30-32, 34; Kane covers, 25, 29; Bonelle/Russell cover, 33

* Series conceived by Roy Thomas, inspired by the novel by H.G. Wells; lead character Killraven and much of original plotline conceived by Neal Adams.

(continued from page 3)

of super-heroes was his method of defeating menaces. He believed a person's most powerful weapon is his brain, and this is all he used or needed to use against any foe, whether alien invaders or domestic miscreants. This aspect was driven home most effectively in what many consider to be the best story of the series, "The Planet that Came to a Standstill" (Mystery in Space #75).

In this tale, the villain Kanjar Ro, seeking revenge on the Justice League of America, comes to Rann hoping to gain Superman-like powers from Rann's triple sun. He succeeds, and proceeds to demolish the Justice League. While the Leaguers are being beaten, they are also feeling sorry for "poor Adam Strange" who must stand by helplessly because he has no super powers.

The League soon learns, however, that Adam was not standing by helplessly, but thinking. He reasoned that if Superman was weakened by metal from his native Krypton, Kanjar Ro would be similarly weakened by metal from his home planet of Dhor. Adam threw a rod of Dhorite at him, and Kanjar Ro keeled over, defeated. Where the Justice Leaguers' brute strength had failed, Adam Strange's quick thinking had saved the day!

From then on, Adam Strange was not only referred to as Earth's first spaceman and Champion of Rann, but also as fandom's Thinking Man's Hero.

Adam's first Showcase adventures were illustrated adequately by Mike Sekowsky, but his later adventures in Mystery in Space were handled with loving care by Carmine Infantino, and edited by Julie Schwartz. The inking was done by Joe Gella, and later Murphey Anderson and Sid Greene. But it was under Anderson's dark, clean and moody inks that Infantino's pencils looked their best. Infantino used a simple, draftsman style in depicting his character and the Rann landscape, and the combination of the two talents was a beauty to behold. Until the 1970's, this was probably the greatest art team in comics.

Adam went on for another couple of years as king of Mystery in Space, but as super-heroes became the best sellers, it was apparent his days were numbered. Hawkman was added to the comic, and soon overshadowed the scarlet spaceman. When Hawkman left for his own magazine, so did Fox, Schwartz, Infantino, Anderson, and the readers. Jack Schiff became the editor, and Lee Elias took over Adam Strange. Neither obviously cared for the strip, but dragged it out for another ten issues before putting it to its final rest.

But Schwartz and Fox loved the character, and did not want to see him forgotten. He appeared in a full-length story, teamed up with Hawkman in issue #18 of the winged wonder's magazine, and many loose ends were tied up. Still, Adam and Alanna were not married, apparently because Schwartz still envisioned a new series of interplanetary adventures.

When Deadman bombed (financially, at least) in Strange Adventures, the decision was made to return the magazine to its original format of science fiction stories, and the lead feature would be Adam Strange reprints. Schwartz and Infantino hoped the book would sell well enough to warrant a new series. Fan response was good, and a new story by Denny O'Neil, Gil Kane, and Murphy Anderson was printed. Unfortunately, O'Neil did not keep Adam in character, and Kane's pencils were too loose, making the story seem hardly like a well-constructed Adam Strange story at all.

Another attempt was made with the experimental "picture story" format, which combined text with pictures. It, too, flopped.

Hopes for a new series were dashed, until several issues of reprints later, Schwartz announced that when reprints ran out, a new series would be started. Len Wein told me that he had been slated to write the new stories, but the book was cancelled two issues before they were to begin.

Apparently, all hopes of a new series are gone. A recent Justice League two-parter finally married off Adam and Alanna, nullified the Zeta beam so he no longer has to return to Earth, and left the couple to live happily ever after.

It's probably better that way. The super-heroes and monsters are too popular to allow the presence of one lone spaceman who uses his brain instead of a gimmick. Those of us who know Adam Strange and Alanna will always fondly remember them, and we will remember that back in the days when comics were still children's entertainment, there was, at least, one adult strip.

(For those interested, Adam Strange is also mentioned briefly in Paul Kupperberg's article beginning on page 21--fsl)

(continued from page 18)

rat sitting on his chest with saliva dripping all over Killraven's neck and chest and such. I don't know if the Code would've allowed that, to be honest, but that cover would've sold. It would've been, I think, very powerful.

I think that since Craig's been doing the covers, at least, the covers have been a lot better. I think what was bad the time that Starlin did his was something I objected to on the cover, but that wasn't Jim, that was an editorial decision that was made putting Carmilla at Killraven's feet on the cover--but to be honest, if that helped sell the book, I really don't care, as long as she doesn't have to be that way inside. Craig's first one, with the Death Breeders, I really liked. All you have to do is look at the structure of that, look at the force lines, look at the symmetry. There's just so much going on on that cover, and yet it's simple, direct. I feel less satisfied with the one for the reprint issue, but when we got back to doing "The Day the Monuments Shattered" (AA #31 --fsl), I liked that cover a lot. It gives you a really good feeling, because that was one of the first covers we did that really had a sense of galaztic emptiness, of being more than just one planetary sphere, going to a kind of depth that transcends just . . . our own sphere.

NIMBUS: And . . . that's the whole mood you're trying to get at, isn't it?

DON: Yeah. The strip has really gone a lot in that direction. There are things developing slowly. I'm not trying to rush by, because in this strip there are so many things you can do, and if you blow it all at once you may come up with something later on and say, "Geez, I should've used this at that point, I didn't think it through enough."

NIMBUS: Will the freemen ever carry the fight to Mars?

DON: Yes, they will; it's almost what the series is about.

NIMBUS: But that'll be far in the future, right?

DON: It'll be 'way in the future! I have a lot of stories before that. There will be some stuff where they do get to leave Earth, though, before they go to Mars--you'd better re-read "Only the Computer Shows Me Any Respect." A lot of the stuff that'll be going on in the future is in that--it reveals why Killraven is such a special character, why he's the focal point in this war between two worlds. It's going to go into quite a bit of that.

NIMBUS: There were plans for a "War of the Worlds" text story. Whatever happened to it?

DON: Whatever happened is I never wrote it. On top of everything else that was happening to me at the time, I became an editor, and when you become editor of a book . . . man, I had no time for anything; I hardly had time to get out the books I was getting out. And I was finding that I had less and less time to put the kind of energy into my writing of the books as I had before. You know when I first came to Marvel that I was writing three books and had the proofreading job--well, then I took over the black and whites, and Lord, I was taking all kinds of time and energy, personal things were going down the drain, my workload was really increasing and my output and productivity were decreasing. Also, at that point, things at Marvel weren't too good, I didn't know how much acceptance I had there, and it put me into a very insecure stage: I didn't know whether the next thing I wrote was going to get lambasted, or what. And it kind of tightens you up a little bit at the reins--it put me into an incredible writer's block. I hated that because I love writing--two things in life that I love, my family and my writing, and both of them were going, man, and it was difficult to sit behind the typewriter . . . and I hated the fact that it was happening. As a matter of fact, at the end of "Panther's Rage," that whole thing about the Panther the way he used to be--in a way I was speaking about myself as a writer, how I felt when I first came in, the things that've happened since then that put me into some really bad trips that made it difficult to get my head straightened out. By the way, that relates to another question you asked, if there's much of me in my writing: Yes, and it's all over the place, and most of it just works within the basis of the stories.

NIMBUS: Some of the things you can acheive in prose and some of the effects you might acheive by visual means, i.e., the comic book--how would that have affected the text story had you written it?

DON: It would've affected it a lot. With text you can flow--that's one of the things I try and do in my writing for comics, get a kind of flow, a kind of meter that flows from one caption to the next. It's not always possible, and it bothers me, especially when I have to cut the thing, because then I feel not only that I haven't examined all the aspects of the situation I could've, but I've interrupted the narrative flow. Probably the best way to put that is to ask if you've ever heard Rod Serling's narrations on "The Twilight Zone."

NIMBUS: Of course.

DON: There's a kind of flow and meter to that, and I'm trying to put my own kind of flow and meter to my own work. One of the things you're going to have to remember is that my books are written differently from each other--Cage is written differently from "Killraven," "Killraven" is written differently from Jungle Action or the "Morbius" strip, or an independant strip.

NIMBUS: Lastly now, what are your feelings on our Earthian future, as viewed through "Killraven"?

DON: A lot of that really is embodied in the "Killraven" strip, my feelings toward the corporate society, the mass media, and so forth. It says pretty much what I feel I have to--and I guess it's an argument that there'll always be hope.

* * * * *

The interview proper may be over, the the complete story, believe it or not, has a few more things to offer before it's over. See, the interview idea came up as the result of a rather enthusiastic phone conversation once between myself and Mr. McGregor. We'd planned on it for a long time, intending on using a recent trip to New York as a vehicle for conducting it. Sadly (for Don), personal problems got in the way, so the interview was postponed. Before we'd decided on that, however, Don and I stayed up late one night at his new apartment and, after the wildest set of circumstances one could imagine (like driving across New York City at 11:00 at night, without lights, and with a fireplace strapped to the roof of a Toyota--so help me!), we decided to give the interview a go. Though it was aborted after a few sleepy, incoherent minutes, I'd like to show some highlights--Don, stay with us . . . I previewed it with Melonie, Mark and Rich before putting it on stage. They got a kick out of it (and so might I before this is over!), and I think everyone else will, too (or, at least I hope so . . . !).

* * * * *

FSL: As well as being about "War of the Worlds," I'd like to mention a few things about you as well--where you were born, educated, things like that.

DFM: I was born? That's news to me. How do you know all these things about me? You been checking into my past?

FSL: Well, not really--I just like to research my topics.

DFM: Thank you.

FSL: Anytime. This is just for the interview's framing sequence.

DFM: Framing sequence, eh?

FSL: Yeah, that's where . . .

DFM: I know what it is! Yes, I was born in the state of Rhode Island, oh, at some point in time, and I grew up there and I spent a lot of time there, and I hung out with this kid there, and then I got to be in New York, and now I write comic books. Anything else you'd like to ask me about this?

FSL: Am I subjecting you to torture?

DFM: That's okay, I'll get you for it.

FSL: We gonna be serious now?

DFM: You kidding? You always conduct your interviews at a quarter past two in the morning???

* * * * *

FSL: The relationship between Carmilla and M'Shulla--what can you say about that?

DFM: What are your talking about? Are you trying to alude to the fact that Carmilla is black and M'Shulla is white?

FSL: (pause) I thought it was the other way around?

* * * * *

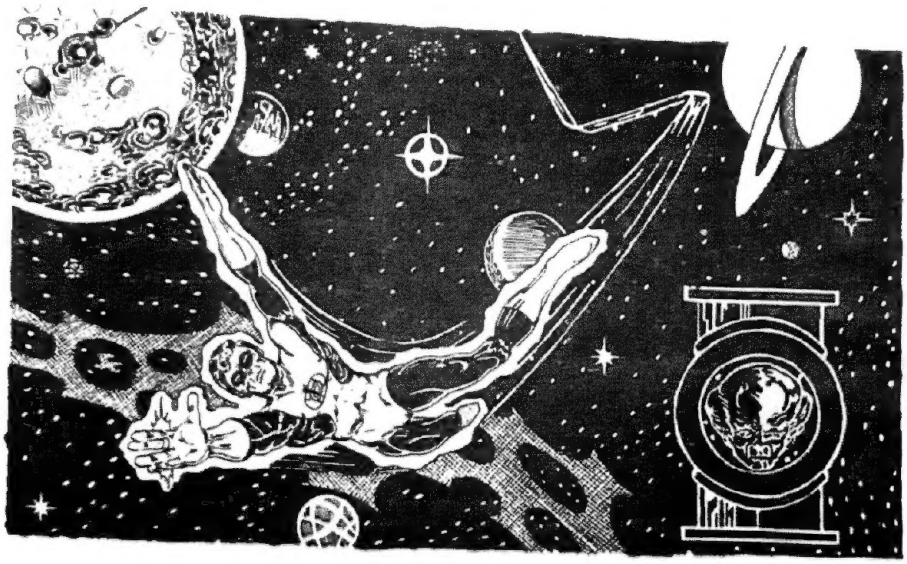
FSL: In the annals of comicdom, you've introduced a character unique by any standards, Grok . . .

DFM: He's never spoken a word! How can he be unique?!?

* * * * *

DFM: Listen--you just run this as it is, and your readers will say . . . "Wow, that was a strange interview."

SUPER-HEROES, SPACE OPERA, AND SPIFFY STUFF
BY PAUL KUPPERBERG



Space Opera

Ask any three different people what it is and you'll undoubtedly get three different answers. It's not a most unusual situation--there are enough ambiguous terms in our language without having "space opera" and/or "science-fiction" and/or "cosmic sagas" to foul things up. Still, a definition of terms seems to be in order. The best one I've come across is from Alva Rogers' book, A Requiem for Astounding, in which Rogers describes an E.E. "Doc" Smith novel. Essentially, Rogers says that space opera in general (and Smith in particular) " . . . used the entire galaxy (and then some) as a stage, the slashing space battles so well described . . . . " There's probably an element of melodrama involved in it also, but who knows? The definition more or less sums it up--in writing space opera, one is free to do whatever one wants, wherever one wants, in this whole, entire and much, much bigger than a bread-box universe. You name it and, for better or worse, space opera has got it; that may be why it's so much fun--because in taking that above-mentioned definition into mind, one might justifiably include such galaxy-spanning strips as Warlock and Capt. Marvel right up there with the original dean of the modern comic book's version of space opera---The Justice League of America.

Wa-ait a minute, now! Whazzat!?! The Justice League and space opera? How're they connected, for heaven's sake? It's quite simple, actually--a great many of the 120+ issues of the JLA have been stories in the cosmic and/or space opera vein. And it's interesting to note that many of today's quite refined comic book opuses have taken inspiration from those long-ago days. And if you don't believe us, just follow us down the road a bit as we go over some of the more obvious or prominent stories from the series.

The first true s-o story in the JLA appeared in the third issue (March, 1961). Called "The Slave Ship of Space," it involved an alien conquerer named Kanjar-Ro who blackmailed the JLA into helping him by threatening the lives of everyone on Earth (Quite a common threat, y'know--we've been threatened with destruction and/or conquest more times than accountable; it's amazing we're still around to talk about it). In a kind of cosmic rowboat, Kanjar Ro and his six super-hero captives travel the universe (there's the old space opera syndrome, folks!) defeating the rulers of various planets for Kanjar Ro. It's relatively mild stuff, as far as we fans of "Doc" Smith go, but it's still s-o. And while it's comic book space opera as only Gardner Fox and Mike Sekowsky could give us, lo those many years past, take a look at sometime-revered author Roy Thomas' issue #137 of The Hulk. Here the hero/villain is called Xeron, the Star Slayer, true, but Roy, JLA fan that he is/was, apparently couldn't resist doing up the cosmic galley ship/defeat the universe bit.

You're maybe starting to get the idea (the more so since both stories--and the one in JLA #13--owe some allegiance to "Doc" Smith's Skylark of Space!)

In JLA #13, "Superstar Battles Superstar in the Most Amazing Duel of all Time and Space . . . Riddle of the Robot Justice League!" (That's the cover copy of that issue . . . honest! I wouldn't make up something like that.) This story contains some rather interesting s-o elements. Aside from the Justice Leaguers being teleported across time and space, we're given properly one of the mainstays of the s-o genre . . . the gigantic, universe-spanning spaceship!

The most famous cosmic story in the Justice League of America came in issues #21-#22 . . . "Crisis on Earth-One" and "Crisis on Earth-Two," featuring the return of the Justice Society of America. While not exactly space-opera, these two issues do involve the JLA and JSA out in the far depths of space, and when you consider it involved degrees of bi-dimensional teleportation, theoretical musings on time and reality, and a scenario of multi-galactic proportions, you get an idea they might be deserving of mention. And, if you'd like, check out the "old" Avengers similarly meeting the "new" Avengers in Avengers Annual #2. Ah--is the picture getting clearer? (No, I think the horizontal hold is stuck. But onward anyway!--fsl)

Kanjar Ro (you remember him from JLA #3, doncha?) returned in #24 along with his little cosmic rowboat. Once again we have the whole, freakin' universe (even Flatbush?) thrown in there for the JLA to futz around in. Each hero (or team thereof) goes off in different directions to different planets to do what must be done to uphold truth, hustice, and the American way (such as it is!). And, very cosmically, we get ol' Adam Strange thrown into the story to add that little space-operatic flavor. Adam and the JLA zoom around the cosmos and eventually beat spit out of Kanjar Ro. God bless the Good Guys! And this time, while it is Giant-Size Defenders #3 taking the "likewise" plaudits (though Daredevil may be no Adam Strange), the "Thanos" saga in Capt. Marvel #'s 26-33, Iron Man #35, and Avengers #125 can take an honorary step forward (Nice of us!).

Fasten your seatbelts, people, because next I'm jumping all the way ahead to JLA #'s 46 and 47, those being the 1966 team-up of the JLA and JSA. These stories really get into the space-opera schtick. Remember, in the definition, space opera " . . . used the entire galaxy (and then some) . . . . " These stories involve the "then some" part of that:

The Anti-Matter Man, an intelligent being from an anti-matter universe, is threatening the two Earths merely by his presence. Y'see, if the A-M Man touches matter from our universe, the result would be the destruction of some trivial matter--like, Earth-One and Earth-Two. To top all this off, the two Earths are moving together towards bi-dimensional collision. The Spectre is the only one who can save the worlds by physically keeping them apart, and can fight the A-M Man because he (The Spectre) is not made out of matter. Nick Cuti used the same thing between two lovers in E-Man #2's "The Entropy Twins"; Stan Lee created another whole "negative zone" universe to pit his own hapless heroes against similarly a half-dozen times (but most prominently in Fantastic Four Annual #6). Since you al-

(Continued on next page--and ain't you tired of this line?)

(continued from last page)
ready know that Roy Thomas is an old JIA fan, we'll skip mentioning an even more similar menace by Blastaar in X-Men #53--incidentally, the comic that marked the debut of Barry Smith.

How's that for "then some"?

More "and then some" takes place in JIA #'s107-108. this annual JIA-JSA team-up takes us to yet another world . . . Earth-X, the world of the old Quality heroes. Earth-X is a world where the Nazis won World War II and those aforesaid heroes are the underground on that world. The JIA and JSA, while testing a dimension-spanner between their two worlds, are accidentally schtupped to Earth-X where they help the Quality heroes (Uncle Sam, Phantom Lady, the Human Bomb, Doll Man, and the Black Condor, who call themselves the Freedom Fighters) defeat the Nazis. To some extent, it's much the model for Roy Thomas' Fantastic Four #'s 158-163, and the three-earth concept presented there.

Time, that ever-present son of a turtle, forces me, along with its buddy Deadlines, to end this article here. For those who might be either offeneded for somewhat taken aback at my comparisons and/or insinuations, try to keep things within the proper scopes of discussion and reality, okay?

Lastly, many might argue my definition of Space-Opera as it pertains to the Justice League of America. Some of you will agree with me (and God bless all your little souls!). Whatever. This is the Justice League that I have known and loved and the way I have seen it.

The issues I have described may seem to you as merely science-fiction and no more. Not so. Because although the JIA has always been heavy into the area of sf, there is still that slender difference that takes us just so much beyond the conventional ray-guns and space-ship material. . . . And that slender difference really does make up the super-heroes, space-opera, and much, much spiffy stuff!

Revolution!

Next issue, NIMBUS centers on the honor and the dishonor: The tragedies and triumphs of war and anti-war morality in the comics. And while most questions have ultimately two sides, none have ever spoken mildly on this multi-faceted topic--both reprehensibly sick and gloriously heroic in unaccountably different ways.

Coming up: Tony Isabella joins the group in an interview on Marvel's short-lived morality play, WAR IS HELL, and some startling new plans for the future; Archie Goodwin recalls the trials and tribulations of BLAZING COMBAT in the revolutionary 1960's; Ralph Macchio and Mark Casper join forces with ye humble editor to delve into the mysteries and majesty of SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS; a showcase of talented newcomers into the field; plus art, articles, and a decidedly new viewpoint as they're always presented by our regulars and guests.

NIMBUS THREE--War and anti-war morality in the comics--Coming your way soon.

(continued from page 7)
Perhaps I ought to inject here that we (and I can include people like Starlin and Englehart here) are basically writing stories about characters first and foremost. If themes evolve from that creation, it's rather accidental, and rather loose at best. Each character may have a theme (consciousness-growth, say, for Captain Marvel, death-wishing for Thanos), but I don't really think anyone has the time to work out grand themes for an entire series.

There's one thing that stands out about "cosmic" stories . . . there's always something left to say. Every creator's got his unique angle on the universe and humanity within it. That can be expounded for a lifetime (look at Jack Kirby . . .). Complexity will bow to entertainment, as always, but I'm sure there will be shown us new ways of making increasingly complex observations that are fun to read (probably by assuming more sophistication on the reader's part, so less is explained, which is the perpetual dull part).

In any case, and if there's anybody out there who's wondering, where does Mike Friedrich fit into all this?, I'm getting out of it as rapidly as I can financially afford to. Whenever I get back to writing as a full time profession (as I'm sure I will, eventually), we'll see if I'm interested in dealing on such a plane. In the meantime, I publish other people's stuff, and since I enjoy cosmic themes, if my people submit them, you'll see them.

G'nite.

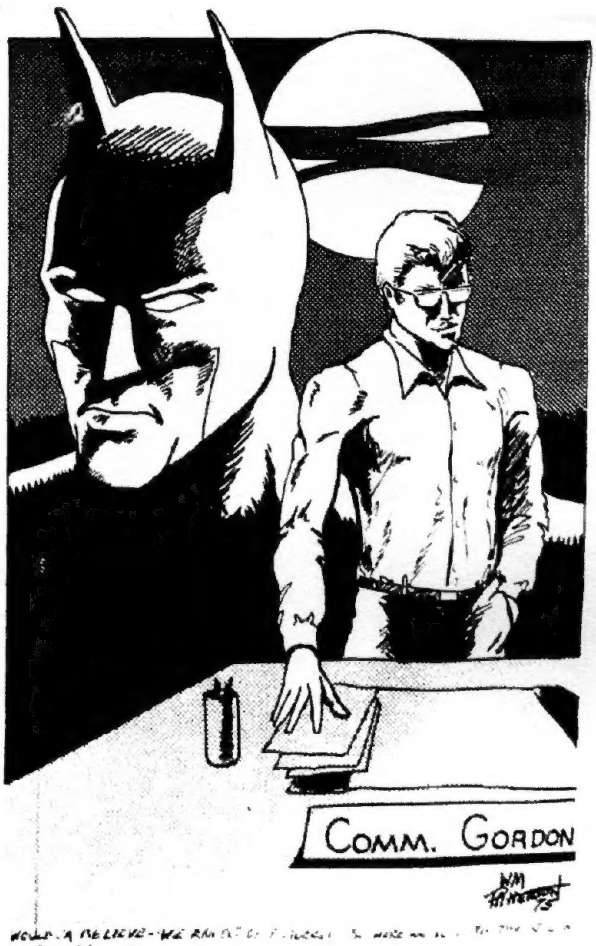
Mike Friedrich's Thanos saga scripts, and Warlock.

in CAPTAIN MARVEL #'s 25-28, 32, along with artists Jim Starlin, Chic Stone, Dave Cockrum, Pablo Marcos, Al Milgrom, and Dan Green. Writing assist only on the latter.

in IRON MAN #54 (first appearance Moondragon) and #55 (first appearance Drax, the Destroyer), along with artists Jim Starlin, George Tuska, Vince Colletta, Mike Esposito, and inspiration from Bill Everett in the former.

in MARVEL FEATURE (starring the Thing and Iron Man) #12, along with artists Jim Starlin and Joe Sinnot.

and,. aside from the Thanos saga, in WARLOCK #'s 3-4, 6-8, along with artists Gil Kane, Bob Brown, and Tom Sutton.



PROTEAN THOUGHTS

by dave fryxell

THE DREAM-QUEST OF UNKNOWN FRYXELL

Almost every H. P. Lovecraft story begins with the protagonist/narrator gasping out his warning in his last hours before the Lurking Fear from the Mountains of Madness gobbles him up. As I sit, after last issue's column, anticipating the assault of the David Micheline Fan Club (members of his immediate family), I can easily sympathize with those poor Deranged Narrators. Let me, then, in whatever time I have left to me, dwell on some of the more positive aspects of contemporary comics, and launch from there into "theory."

Specifically, I'd like to look at two titles that seem to rise above the general miasma of banality--Marvel Comics' "Warlock" (formerly in STRANGE TALES, now in his own book once again), and "Master of Kung Fu" (in the book by the same name). Artwise, both are undeniably superior. One does have the troublesome feeling, however, in looking at the art, that it is not really as technically well done as that in other, less effective books. The anatomy of Paul Gulacy (MOKF) is at best imperfect; Jim Starlin (WARLOCK) often draws oddly-muscled figures, and his shading is not what one expects in comics, certainly not as skillfully done as that of a Palmer or a Giordano.

The solution to this anomaly is the writing of both strips. By "writing" here I mean, more precisely, story-telling. Both Starlin and Gulacy are superb story-tellers; they know how to move the reader's eye along, how to create a mood, how to evoke a sense of wonder and awe. The difference between Gulacy and Starlin and lesser artists who may be technically as skillful or more so is much the same as the difference between a Hitchcock film and a monster movie. Like Hitchcock, both these men are visual story-tellers; there are too few others like them now in comics--Names like Steranko, Eisner and Adams take on a double aspect when their present comic book work is rare indeed; still, we've Berni Wrightson yet to scare away. In any case, their task they know is not simply to tkae the writer's vision and illustrate it, to draw the characters doing the things the writer describes--the task of the artist in this very special medium is to make the writer's vision one with the printed page.

Movement is all-important in comic art, just as it is in film. The movement from one panel to the next, as from one shot to the next, must be natural and unforced. Angles, shadows, distance, geometrics--they should all command the reader's attention. Both Starlin and Gulacy are adept at matching the tone of a panel to its message. They can blend close-up shots for impact, long shots for setting and mood, and angle shots for panel motion without having the storyline appear to be a disconnected jumble.

Sophisticated artistic story-telling alone does not raise "Warlock" and "Master of Kung Fu" above other titles. The plots, dialogue, and themes are as refined and adult as the artwork. It is difficult for an artist to insert nuances of characterization and motivation if the writer is aiming his material at third-graders. "Master of Kung Fu," written by Doug Moench, deals with problems os life, loyalty, and violence while presenting a quite compelling adventure story. The comic can be read on two distinct levels. "Warlock" is even more intellectually sophisticated; artist/writer Jim Starlin utilizes cosmic concepts, surrealism, and philosophy to tell a story as far above the level of "Superman" as ULYSSES is from the pulps. At one point in a recent issue (STRANGE TALES #179), for instance, Warlock struggles with the problem of leadership: "I seek an alternative. I rule no one, so no one rules me." Unlike the average pulp hero, he chooses not to lead a rebellion. Warlock struggles with his own identity, with the dual nature of man. Flawed though it might be, his story is not that of an "average" comic book hero.

These are the key elements, I think, in lifting a comic book out of the ghetto of mediocrity and into some degree of sophistication and elevated thought-content--even in retaining the sense of downright fun and fantasy. The artist must serve as a story-teller, rather than just an illustrator, and the writer must endow his story with a sense of meaning and depth above that of the superficial hero-meets-villain/hero-defeats-villain plot. It's much the same as the difference between space opera and "literary" science-fiction: There is nothing more to Perry Rhodan than what one can glean from the surface; DUNE, on the other hand, is both more skillfully told and has more to say. For someone to try and sum up STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND as "the story of a Martian coming to Earth and setting up a new religion" is ludicrous.

Comic books cannot, perhaps, deal with the issues of men's lives as probingly or as effectively as might novels or plays. I can't see FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS properly adapted to comics form, much less FINNEGAN'S WAKE. (However, comics do have the aspect of a visual impact that novels do not. Some things may be more effectively said with words and pictures than words or pictures alone--we may never know. There have been no Fitzgeralds or Faulkners in the comics so far.) Comic books, then, can and should delve more deeply into the simple problems that make up everyday life. Characters should have depth and motivation instead of simply super powers; cardboard people are just not good enough. Death should not be treated lightly, as a mere earasure--"writing someone out of the strip"--and justice should not be seen as a simple thing, a matter of throwing wrongdoers behind bars.

As a visual medium, comics are uniquely suited for certain types of stories, for the highest flights of imagination. There is simply no excuse for today's many stereotypes, humorless slugfests, and mindless action--except laziness and lack of talent.

The rewards for superior efforts in comics, as I mentioned last issue, are no greater than those for half-hearted efforts. Jim Starlin is not going to win any Pulitzer Prizes or (I assume) see his works hanging in the Museum of Modern Art. The sales of his books may not be helped by his sophisticated approach; readers who want a predictable, easy escape medium may even be turned off. Don Heck and Mike Sekowsky make as much money--Who knows? Maybe more--for their soulless work.

We can only hope that men like Jim Starlin, Paul Gulacy, et al., are Artists enough to get all the reward they require from their own pleasure at work well done, at having put something of themselves into their creations. Whether that reward is ample lies in each individual artist's viewpoint.

End of sermon. Please--check or money orders only in the collection plate!

Thanks and peace,

Dave Fryxell

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